B. Franklin, Printer
Improving the Self and Community through
Writing and Work

THE HISTORY PROJECT
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, IRVINE

Standards Addressed

8.1   Students understand the major events preceding the founding of the nation and relate their
        significance to the development of American constitutional democracy.

        8.1.4   Describe the nation's blend of <u>civic republicanism</u>, classical liberal principles, and English
                  parliamentary traditions.

Chronological and Spatial Thinking

2.   Students construct various time lines of key events, people, and periods of the historical era they are
        studying.

Historical Interpretation

1.   Students explain the central issues and problems from the past, placing people and events in a matrix
        of time and place.

Guiding Questions:

1. Why would Benjamin Franklin say that he wanted to be remembered above all
    as B. Franklin, printer?
2. How does the biography of an important figure like Benjamin Franklin help us to
    understand the philosophical principles on which the United States was
    founded?

Lesson Objectives:

- Students will understand the significance of Benjamin Franklin's printing career and
  the concepts of civic virtue that he popularized in his publications.
- Students will learn and understand the concept of historical context
- Students will construct and interpret time lines

Procedure
1. Opening discussion: Ask students what they know about Benjamin Franklin. They
    might know about his kite experiment, and know he's on money, and know he was a
    founding father. Ask if they know what he did for a living before he was a scientist or
    became involved in politics.

2. Timeline activity (see attached). Ask students to fill out the comparative timeline worksheet with important events from Ben Franklin's life and important events from colonial America. Discuss the events that students included in their timelines, and encourage them to draw connections between events in Franklin's life and what was happening in colonial America. Use the connections that emerge to segue into a discussion of the importance of historical context. Emphasize that although Benjamin Franklin was an amazing individual, he was also a person of his time, and that his priorities later in life were connected to things he did as a young man.

3. Introduce Benjamin Franklin's early life, and have students read Document A, below. If possible, show the video from the Ben Franklin 300 exhibit website (embedded between 1725-1730 on the timeline) demonstrating the printing process to emphasize that it was a difficult, dirty, and time-consuming job. In addition to the physical demands of printing, colonial printers were responsible for the content of what they printed. Lead students in a discussion that compares colonial printing with "the press" in present-day America. Focus especially on what it takes to publish in an era of multiple formats (traditional newspapers, television, and media conglomerates, as well as the various forms of internet publishing, including facebook, twitter, and blogs) and the importance of the press for communicating ideas. Present examples of some of the materials that Franklin wrote and published, including the Silence Dogood letters and "An Apology for Printers." [Documents C and D below]

4. Discuss Benjamin Franklin's "Civic Vision." In both his personal and professional life, he emphasized the importance of self-improvement and community involvement. Discuss the formation of the Junto, and the way that led to the creation of the Library Company, the first subscription library in North America. [See Document B] Explain some of the other projects that Franklin was involved with, including the first public hospital and the first property insurance company in North America, as well as the first fire company in Philadelphia and an all-volunteer militia. Present students with the Library Company's seal. In small groups (or as a guided large group), have the students work through the "4-Cs of Primary Source Analysis" on this seal and the ways in which it represents Ben Franklin's vision of civic engagement.

   Note: For background on Ben Franklin's various civic projects, see Billy G. Smith, "Benjamin Franklin, Civic Improver," in *Benjamin Franklin: In Search of a Better World*, edited by Page Talbott (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), which is excerpted in Lesson 5, "What Good May I Do: Benjamin Franklin and the American Civic Association," at http://www.benfranklin300.org/curriculum_middle.htm.

5. Activity: have the students, individually or in small groups, design a seal that represents their "civic vision." Using the seal of the Library Company of Philadelphia as a model, ask them to design a seal that represents an ideal or a plan to improve the quality of life in their community. The seal should include both a motto and an image that represents key elements of this civic vision.

Source:
http://www.benfranklin300.org/frankliniana/result.php?id=564&sec=0

Source:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Library_Company_of_Philadelphia_seal.jpg

On the left is the Seal of the Library Company of Philadelphia and on the right is a contemporary rendition of the seal. The motto around the edge translates as "To pour forth benefits for the common good is divine."

6. Writing: The press has a special place in American public life, as demonstrated by its guaranteed freedom in the First Amendment. Instead of the slow and dirty process of colonial America, printers today work with computers and publish ideas instantly. Knowing what we know about Benjamin Franklin's many civic projects, write an essay that explains why he would want to be remembered above all as simply "B. Franklin, printer"?

Sources:

Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary, http://www.benfranklin300.org/index.php

The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin

4-C's of Primary Source Analysis
http://www.humanities.uci.edu/history/ucihp/tah/index.php

Document A: B. Franklin, Printer
Adapted from Benjamin Franklin, "How I Became a Printer in Philadelphia"
http://odur.let.rug.nl/~usa/B/bfranklin/franklin_how.htm

Benjamin Franklin's formal education spanned only two years. He attended grammar school until Josiah Franklin, his father, decided that it was time to learn a trade. Benjamin was 10 years old at the time, and began working in his father's shop making soap and candles. The boy's misery in that trade led Josiah to consider other options, until he finally arranged for Benjamin to be apprenticed to his brother James, a printer in Boston.	grammar school-elementary school trade-career apprentice - someone who works for an employer for a fixed period of time in order to learn a particular skill or job
Printing was not an easy task. Setting print required skill and dexterity, and a printer's job was dirty and physically demanding. Despite the challenges of the job, Franklin loved it.	dexterity - skill and speed in doing something with your hands
Before completing his apprenticeship to his brother, young Benjamin ran away from Boston, going first to New York, and then to Philadelphia, where he secured a job working for another printer.	
In 1728, Franklin and a partner opened their own printing and stationery shop. In 1729 they were elected the official government printers of Pennsylvania, and later that year Franklin purchased his partner's share of the business. For the next 17 years, Franklin made a name for himself, and a fortune, as a printer. Franklin retired from his printing work at the age of 42, but remained active in a whole range of activities, including science, politics, and civic improvement.	stationery - materials that you use for writing, such as paper, pens, pencils

Question: Why did Benjamin Franklin become a printer?

Document B: "Benjamin Franklin, Civic Improver"
Excerpted from Billy G. Smith, "Benjamin Franklin, Civic Improver," in *Benjamin Franklin: In Search of a Better World*, edited by Page Talbott (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005). See Lesson 5, "What Good May I Do: Benjamin Franklin and the American Civic Association," at http://www.benfranklin300.org/curriculum_middle.htm.

The initial energy that drove many early civic improvements emanated from the Leather Apron Club, called the Junto, founded by Franklin in 1727. The original name, taken from the customary attire of artisans, reflected the organization's membership and goals. … To raise the level of informed debate, Franklin suggested that the members of the club pool their books to form a library. The accumulated volumes filled only one end of the room on Market Street furnished by Robert Grace; after a year, "for want of due Care" of the books, and because members were loath to part with their best volumes, the collection was disassembled. However, Franklin's "first Project of a public Nature" grew out of this experiment. In 1731 he proposed plans for a subscription library; rather than pooling their books, members would pool their financial resources, thereby creating funds to establish a communal library greater than any of them could have built individually.	initial-first emanated – to come from or out of something customary attire – traditional clothes artisans - someone who does skilled work, making things with their hands pool – to combine your money, ideas, skills etc with those of other people so that you can all use them accumulated volumes-the group of books combined together loath – to be unwilling to do something disassembled-taken apart, no longer together subscription - an amount of money you pay regularly to be a member of an organization or to help its work

Questions:

1. Who were members of the Junto?
2. Why did the Junto members decide to form a library?
3. Why was the private Junto library insufficient?

Document C: Silence Dogood Letters
http://www.ushistory.org/franklin/courant/silencedogood.htm

While working as his brother's apprentice, Benjamin Franklin wrote a series of letters critiquing society and celebrating the virtuous life. The young apprentice knew that his brother would never print the letters knowing that his teenaged apprentice had written them, so Benjamin delivered them under the pseudonym (false name) of Silence Dogood. He even went so far as to create a life story to make her more convincing. The excerpt below describes her childhood education.

My Master was a Country Minister, a pious good-natur'd young Man, and a Batchelor: he labour'd with all his Might to instil vertuous and godly Principles into my tender Soul, well knowing that it was the most suitable Time to make deep and lasting Impressions on the Mind, while it was yet untainted with Vice, free and unbiass'd. He endeavour'd that I might be instructed in all that Knowledge and Learning which is necessary for our Sex, and deny'd me no Accomplishment that could possibly be attained in a Country Place; such as all Sorts of Needle-Work, Writing, Arithmetick, &c. and observing that I took a more than ordinary Delight in reading ingenious Books, he gave me the free Use of his Library, which tho' it was but small, yet it was well chose, to inform the Understanding rightly, and enable the Mind to frame great and noble Ideas.	pious - having strong religious beliefs, and showing this in the way you behave Batchelor-(bachelor) a single, unmarried man instil – (instill) to teach someone to think, behave, or feel in a particular way over a period of time vertuous – (virtuous) behaving in a very honest and moral way vice - a bad or immoral quality in a person, or bad or immoral behavior endeavour'd- (endeavored) to very hard unbiass'd – (unbiased) unbiased information, opinions, advice etc is fair because the person giving it is not influenced by their own or other people's opinions Needle-Work – general term for the art of sewing enable- to allow

Questions:
1. Why did the minister think it was best to teach "vertuous" principles to the young?
2. What kind of education did Silence Dogood receive?
3. What did Silence Dogood consider good about her master's library?

Document D: Benjamin Franklin, excerpt from "An Apology for Printers"
http://www.uark.edu/depts/comminfo/cambridge/apology.html

In colonial America, printers were responsible for the content of their publications. Franklin's *Pennsylvania Gazette* drew criticism from religious groups in 1731 for publishing an announcement of a ship's departure that contained a suggestive reference to "Black Robes." Franklin's response to such criticism came in the form of "An Apology for Printers," which both explains the particular challenges of the printing trade and lays out an argument in favor of a free press.

Printers do continually discourage the Printing of great Numbers of bad things, and stifle them in the Birth. I my self have constantly refused to print any thing that might countenance Vice, or promote Immorality; tho' by complying in such Cases with the corrupt Taste of the Majority, I might have got much Money. I have also always refus'd to print such things as might do real Injury to any Person, how much soever I have been solicited, and tempted with Offers of great Pay; and how much soever I have by refusing got the Ill-will of those who would have employ'd me. I have heretofore fallen under the Resentment of large Bodies of Men, for refusing absolutely to print any of their Party or Personal Reflections. In this Manner I have made my self many Enemies, and the constant Fatigue of denying is almost insupportable. But the Publick being unacquainted with all this, whenever the poor Printer happens either through Ignorance or much Persuasion, to do any thing that is generally thought worthy of Blame, he meets with no more Friendship or Favour on the above Account, than if there were no Merit in't at all.	stifle - to stop something from happening or developing

countenance - to accept, support, or approve of something

solicited-to ask someone to do something for money
soever – in any way at all

ill-will - unfriendly or unkind feelings towards someone
heretofore - before this time
resentment- a feeling of anger because you think what happened is unfair

fatigue-exhaustion, being really tired

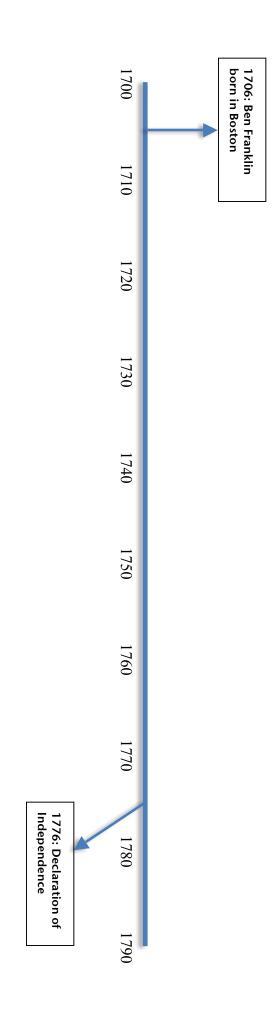Merit- a good quality of something, something that is worthwhile |

Questions:
1. What would Benjamin Franklin not print?
2. What did he do that made him enemies?

Ben Franklin's Early Life: A Comparative Timeline

Directions:

Use your textbook and the [Ben Franklin 300](#) website to make a list of important dates in the life of Benjamin Franklin and in the history of Colonial America. What was happening in the colonies as Ben was growing up? What was he doing at important moments in colonial history? Think about how his view of the world might have been shaped by what was going on around him.

Important events in Ben Franklin's life

Important events in colonial America

1700 1710 1720 1730 1740 1750 1760 1770 1780 1790

1706: Ben Franklin born in Boston

1776: Declaration of Independence